

Pastor Writes

First of all let me take this opportunity to wish you all a very happy, prosperous and blessed New Year. May God who has been our rock and our refuge in the past year go before us as a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud and watch over us. We begin this New Year by focusing on our theme 'The name of Jesus.' In Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet we see Juliet telling Romeo that a name is an artificial and meaningless convention. And therefore says "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Juliet's statement discloses that the character of a person remains constant and does not change. However, naming of a child was very important to the people of West Asia as much as it is to us. Names show the hopes and aspirations of the parents. So this morning we will be looking at the revelation of God's name in the Old Testament, the revelation of God's name through Jesus and its implication for us.

In the Old Testament Moses is called to lead the Israelites from bondage to freedom as they are slaves in Egypt. Moses comes up with numerous excuses as to why he should not go. Moses then asks God that if the people ask him, "What is his name?" then what should he say. God said to Moses "I AM Who I AM". This is what you will say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you". The name 'I AM' comes from the verb 'to be'. With vowels inserted the name becomes YAHWEH. Before this time God's people knew him Elohim translated God. The name 'I Am Who I Am' clearly describes God as a living God who is active in history. The name signifies that God is self-existent and independent of anything else. He is the unchanging eternal God. The name also means God of action, God of power, God who releases people from bondage. The Exodus reveals YAHWEH. In other words YAWEH is telling Moses, "you will know who I am when you see me in action." YAHWEH was in covenant relationship with their ancestors. This same God who was worshiped in the Old Testament is revealed in and through Jesus. The God of the exodus is also the God revealed in human flesh, Jesus Christ. So as we enter this new year we can take tremendous courage that God is a powerful God who does signs and wonders and is able to deliver us from all kinds of bondages whether it be personal, whether it is as a community or as a nation.

In the Gospel reading we have the naming of Jesus. The angel gave the good news to the shepherds, who in turn went to find Mary, Joseph and the baby. When they found them and saw Him they spread the word concerning what had been told about this child. Luke records for us that on the 8th day when it was customary to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus. Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant—every male was to do it on the 8th day reminding them that they belong to Yahweh completely.

What does the name Jesus means? Jesus is actually the Greek form of the Hebrew name Yeshua or Joshua in English meaning – Yahweh is salvation. The name of a person also stands for power and character. The angel explained that Jesus would save his people from their sins. He was to be a Saviour. In the Old Testament the 'Saviour' word group refers to a deliverer primarily to God. Luke wants his readers to see the meaning in terms of rescue and delivery from peril in both physical and spiritual senses. Jesus is God's deliverer for His people. The title that is applied to God is now applied to Jesus who functions as a deliverer. So we see that Jesus is a Savior of the world and make this offer of salvation to all who believe in his name. 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish and have eternal life.' The name of Jesus offers deliverance from sin, and it offers us salvation. It also offers us strength and power against the attacks of evil one.

In the New Testament from the book of Acts, Peter and John were going into the temple when a lame man begged them for money. Peter replied, "Silver and Gold I do not have but what I have, I give you in the name of Jesus, walk". The man immediately jumped to his feet and was completely healed. Peter then explains that the Jews had rejected Jesus and had killed him but God raised him up from the dead and that they were witnesses to it. Peter then says by "faith in the name of Jesus this man who you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him as we can all see."

As we begin his year we need to remember that salvation is through Jesus. "Everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved." All power and authority is given in Jesus's name. As we enter the New Year we are encouraged by the fact that God is on the throne and that there is power and authority over everything and everyone in the name of Jesus. We step out boldly in the New Year as we receive the forgiveness of sins and we accept him as our Saviour and go into the world as we acknowledge him as our Lord. May God's salvation and power work in and through our lives in the coming year.

***Shalom
Paul Swarup***